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REVIEWS IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE | NEXT ISSUE

A DAZZLING DISPLAY OF
DEATH, DEPRAVITY AND DESTRUCTION

Death Scenes: A Homicide Detective's Scrapbook *Edited by* Sean Tejaratchi. Text by Katherine Dunn, 10 x 8 inches
Trade Paperback Edition, 1996, Feral House, P.O. Box 13067, Los Angeles, CA 90013, USA. : : 168 Pages: ISBN 0-922915-29-6: Price $19.95. Limited, Signed Clothbound Edition $39.95

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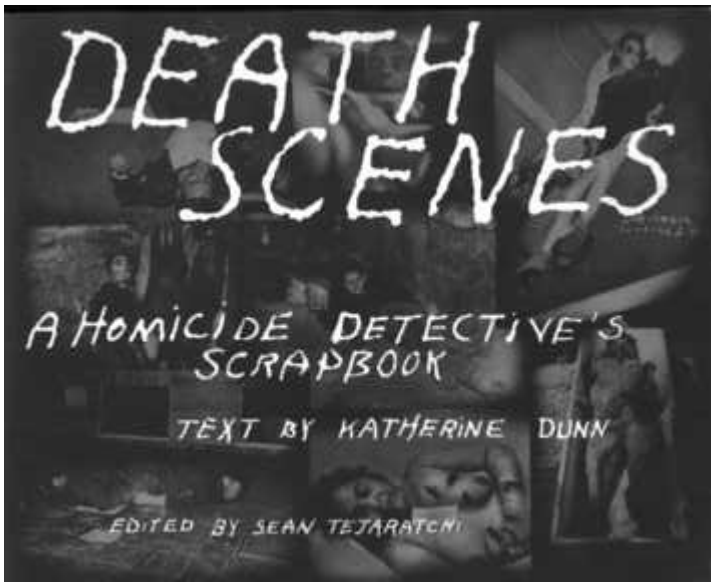


Hermaphrodite? A Medical Curiosity??



We received two interesting books from Feral House a couple of months back, of which we reviewed one (Muerte) in our last issue, and promised to tell our readers about the other soon. One of the reasons for this *deliberate* delay was we were not sure, if readers would be able to take the full dose of this curious *Feral Medicine* in one go. Well, here it is now, as promised.

View this book on Amazon

First the similarities between *Muerte* and *Death Scenes*. Both have mind-blowing, gory, curious, bizarre - but at the same time, some very educative - pictures. While turning the pages of this book, I realized that surrealism does not exist only in Salvador Dali and his followers' imagination, but in real life too. For inside, you find people with bizarre bisexuality, preternatural pathologies and weird wounds. So surreal are they that at times you would tend to think these were the cut and paste job of some crank photographer, but on close examination, you realize that they are for real. These pictures shock you out of your slumber. This is certainly not a coffee time book, nor to be read in the dead of night. If you do so, you may want to do it at your own risk.

A woman killed by her sweetheart. Note the curious placement of wounds



Jack Huddleston in 1921. The book is based on his personal photographs



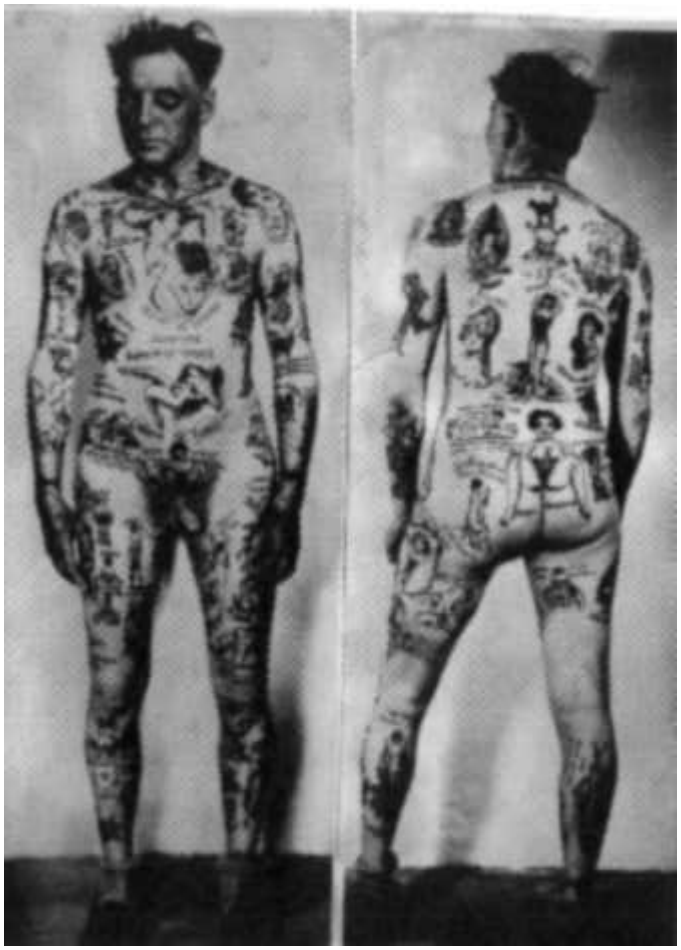
Who has collected these photographs, and for whom are these meant? First question first. The photographs come from the collection of a Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) police officer Jack Huddleston. Not much is known about him, save for the fact that he worked at the LAPD from 1921 till early 1950s, for a period of more than 30 years. He had a love for the bizarre, and whenever he came across any interesting or curious case in the course of his work, he would preserve a photograph of that case, and neatly paste it in his file. It is believed that he had cronies in the police all around USA, and many of them would lend him their photographs for his personal collection. Although most photographs in his collection show grotesque and unusual wounds, there are many photographs with other themes too. But the common denominator of all is their unusualness. All photographs in the book are "out of this world", unique, unusual, bizarre, be it a Siamese cat, a person with zillions of tattoos over him, or ladies with tens of cuts over their breasts.

Huddleston kept compiling these photographs in his personal album, till it became almost six inches thick. He died at an unknown date, and after him his wife, who probably never liked his collection, sold it off. In the mid-eighties, this album fell into the hands of the owners of a used book store in Burbank, who bought it as part of a much larger book collection from an estate sale. They had apparently no use for this "dubious treasure", but they knew who was just the right person who would love it - one of their employees Nick Bougas. And they handed it over to him.

A curious cut at a curious site. Does this indicate sexual violence?



Tattoos are important in Forensic Medicine for identification. But so many tattoos. Do they serve the purpose better?



Nick was an underground artist and a self-described "gore-hound". For sometime, he entertained his guests with this unusual book, but soon he realized that the album would not last forever. The pages were getting worn out and had started giving way at various points. It was very essential to have it restored. But the first thing Nick did was to preserve each and every photo on video tape. It was also called "Death Scenes" which is narrated by Anton LaVey, the High Priest of the Church of Satan. Bougas also visited several of the places mentioned in the scrap book to have a first hand idea of what those places look like today.

When the scrap book fell into the hands of the editors of *Feral House*, they wanted to publish it for the benefit of all. But before going ahead with the publication, they wanted to do some research on the life of Huddleston. Unfortunately they did not get permission from the Head of the Personnel

Division of LAPD, who thought that his staff was too busy to fish out old files related to Huddleston from their basement.

So *Feral House* went ahead and published the scrap book with whatever information they could derive from the scrap book itself. It does have several photographs of Huddleston, mostly with his police cronies and they are all reproduced in the book. We are reproducing one here for the benefit of our readers (Above left, just below the cover of the book). Apparently Huddleston had at one place given the justification of his scrapbook too, for the editors have given this in the beginning. Among other things Huddleston surmises that this collection could help ordinary people gather a better idea of the circumstances in which policemen work, and may be they would come forward more often to help them. Sounds a fair enough justification.

As for the photographs, there are so many of them, that it is impossible to reproduce all, or even a fair sampling. I am reproducing some less astounding ones here. For the more bizarre, may be the readers would like to see the book itself.

A Siamese Cat!



Full man buried in earth, or just the severed head lying on the ground? Readers may want to explore the book to find out.



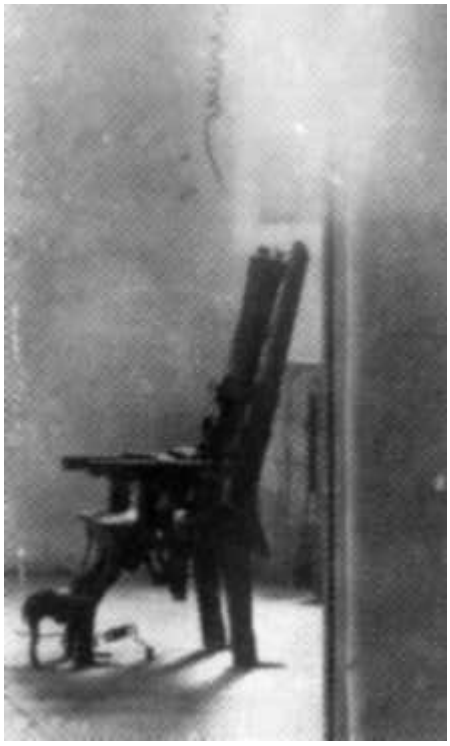
Among the several strange diseases that find place in this scrapbook is elephantiasis. A man is shown with a scrotum so big, it is almost touching the ground? How did he move, or how did he do his other daily routines? A sumo wrestler lying dead on an autopsy table is labeled as a case of elephantiasis. It certainly looks like one, but it could also be a case of morbid obesity. In any case, the photograph is truly unique.

Then there are interesting photographs of leprosy patients and patients having tumors. But what I personally found most horrifying were photographs of small children suffering from hydrophobia. This condition is mercifully not seen now, but we have all read descriptions of this condition in medical books. Very rarely do we get to see photographs of these patients even in medical books.

But this scrap book gives several horrifying photographs of these patients. It is not surprising for this scrap book comes from eary twenties - a period when this condition was quite common. Terror is literally dripping from their faces. In one case there is a photograph of a child with hydrophobia alive and one after her death. The photographs are reproduced side by side. The terror during life and the serenity after death produces a stark contrast. There are also photographs of patients with tetanus, with almost similar faces.

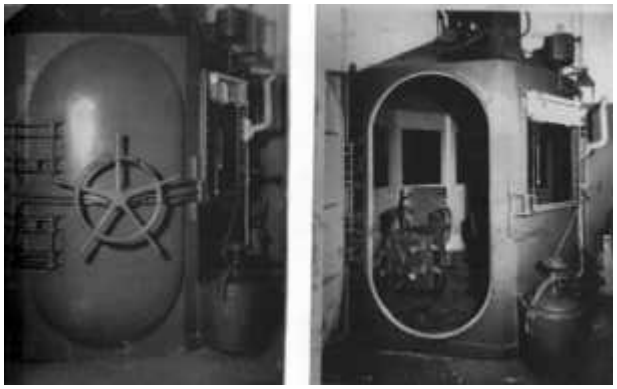
There are mangled remains of a young lover couple on pages 58 and 59, who found dynamite near some dams. They apparently thought it was fun to play with it. The dynamite suddenly exploded leaving both of them in complete ruins.

Sing Sing prison, electric chair. 1928.



In a chapter entitled "Just a little throat trouble", Huddleston gives us the photographs of a number of persons who hanged themselves. All of them are shown hanging, with their clenched fists, rolled out eyes, and protruding tongues. A truly terrific sight.

Lethal gas chamber. San Quentin.



Then there are fantastic stories in the book too. We get to read about one Otto Sanhuber, who was a secret lover of one Mrs. Dolly Oesterreich. So much was he enamored by her, that he lived in her

attic for nine years, without her husband Fred knowing about it! What happened to that relationship? Perhaps the readers would like to find out from the book itself.

The book shows at least two instruments of capital punishment - electric chair and a gas chamber. Among other things, there are mummified babies in dustbins, ladies with slashed breasts, persons with mixed genitals, people who are cut up in eight or more pieces.. .. . One could go on and on endlessly.

The photographs have been retouched using Adobe Photoshop^{TM} 3.03 on a Power Macintosh 7100/80. But this is done only to improve the image quality. The editors tell us that great pains were taken to retain the integrity of the photograph. On the page where they tell us this, they have reproduced two photographs - one an original from the scrap book, and the other after retouching. Although all details are similar, the photograph looks definitely a lot more clearer after retouching.

How does the book differ from *Muerte*? Well, while *Muerte* has color photographs, *Death Scenes* has Black and White photographs. But as the readers would surely notice, sometimes the ghoulishness does come out better in black and white. Secondly, while *Muerte* had been assembled by a journalist (by buying photographs from Mexican magazines), *Death Scenes* is based on the personal collection of a police officer. Save for these two differences, both books are similar in their content, ethos and style. Lovers of the gory and bizarre would enjoy both these books as much I did.

Order *Death Scenes* by Clicking here

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